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SUBJECT: NSA NARAYANAN MEETS WITH U/S BURNS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Burleigh for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan saluted the dynamic nature of the U.S.-India relationship in a June 11 meeting with Under Secretary Burns, stating "we don't want a hiatus." The NSA encouraged visits of senior U.S. officials, and described cooperation on defense and counterterrorism as having reached the "takeoff stage." U.S. Burns iterated that the U.S.-India relationship was of paramount importance to the new administration. Narayanan also pointed to the Agricultural Knowledge Initiative and cooperation in science and technology and education as areas of importance to the new Indian Cabinet. The NSA also encouraged greater exchanges between U.S. and Indian think tanks. He urged the U.S. not to speak of an "exit strategy" in Afghanistan, but to stay the course to achieve stability. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In an upbeat and wide-ranging June 11 discussion with Under Secretary William Burns, Assistant Secretary Robert Blake, and Charge d'affaires Peter Burleigh, NSA Narayanan acknowledged that India had a lot of work to do on internal security, as he had discussed with U/S Burns in the one-on-one exchange prior to the group meeting. The Indian government looked forward to growing cooperation in the Defense and Counterterrorism areas, and would welcome an early visit by Admiral Blair and General Jones. Narayanan expected the close ties developed during the previous U.S. administration to continue and become even stronger. He encouraged U/S Burns to be frank about any problem areas in the relationship.

¶3. (SBU) Narayanan shared that the Prime Minister and the new Indian government were also particularly interested in moving forward on the Agricultural Knowledge Initiative. The government wanted to build on the Green Revolution's successes, and saw maintaining India's ability to feed itself as the most important goal. "Agriculture should be our most important achievement." Narayanan said the government also looked to the U.S. for expanded exchanges on education and science and technology issues. "We want to rev up cooperation, given the new governments on both sides."

¶4. (SBU) Burns assured the NSA that India was at the top of this Administration's list of priorities. He noted there was a strong foundation and bipartisan support for a vibrant relationship between the U.S. and India. "Our bilateral relationship on defense and counterterrorism has reached the takeoff stage," replied Narayanan. The undersecretary pointed out that the U.S. would like to take tangible steps on a number of outstanding issues, in order to advance the relationship.

¶5. (SBU) NSA Narayanan focussed much of the discussion on his desire to foster improved links between think tanks in the U.S. and India. Although some exchanges are already occurring, he felt there should be more structure to the interactions. He also hoped there would be greater cooperation between U.S. institutions and think tanks outside of Delhi, particularly on topics such as foreign policy, defense, security, and economics. Ambassador Shankar pointed out that the Indian Council on World Affairs was trying to rejuvenate itself. It could be one potential interface. Although the Aspen Strategy Group brought some people together, most of those were already senior officials and policy shapers. Narayanan said he would like to see an effort to reach younger people.

¶6. (C) The NSA raised Afghanistan and Pakistan only at the end of the meeting, Burns said that the U.S. placed the highest priority on successful outcomes in Afghanistan. The U.S. was "committed to working with regional players," and was making some progress, but a sustained effort was still required. U.S. efforts were ongoing to convince the Pakistani civilian and military leadership to take action, and we were being very attentive to how U.S. assistance was being used, as well as to the security of nuclear facilities in Pakistan. Burns and Blake stressed that the U.S. appreciated India's assistance to Afghanistan, and pointed out that we are trying to open transit lines to facilitate Afghan exports to the region. Narayanan replied that India would like to maintain and increase its assistance to Afghanistan, but U.S. talk of an "exit strategy" raised concerns that its people would be left vulnerable. India continued to received threats regarding its personnel and projects in Afghanistan, so the spectre of the coalition's withdrawal raised fears. Talk of an exit strategy also encouraged those who believe they could just "wait out" the Americans, added Narayanan. "We must win" in Afghanistan, "to stop the forces of extreme religious ideology from gaining ground. If Afghanistan is lost, Pakistan will definitely go." India had to face that fact that many in Pakistan harbored "absurd suspicions" that India wanted to take over Pakistani territory, even though India wanted to take over part of Pakistan no more than it wanted to "take over part of New Guinea."

¶7. (C) Looking forward to upcoming visits, Narayanan stressed that he looked forward to more exchanges on areas of mutual interest, particularly regarding Afghanistan and developments on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The goal of the terrorist campaign was to divide Indian society, he related, and it was evident that the terrorist network was a worldwide enterprise that had links in many countries.

¶8. (SBU) Under Secretary's Burns office has cleared this message.  
BURLEIGH